

Appl. No. 09/708,492

JAN 17 2006

38. **(Previously presented)** A multiple port unit as recited in claim 30, further comprising a data bus coupled to said control means, said network ports and said serial communication ports.

39. **(Original)** A multiple port unit as recited in claim 31, comprising two network ports and 8 communication ports.

40. **(Previously presented)** A method of coupling plural peripheral devices to computers, said method comprising the steps of:

interrogating the status of plural network connections with a control unit of a multiple port unit having plural network ports coupled to the plural network connections and plural communication serial ports coupled to peripheral devices, the control unit determining whether it is time to interrogate prior to performing the interrogation; and

coupling the plural communication serial ports to one of the network connections based on the results of said step of interrogating the status of plural network connections.

41. **(Original)** A method as recited in claim 40 further comprising the steps of interrogating the status of plural computers respectively coupled to the network connections; and controlling the peripheral devices based on the results of said step of interrogating the status of plural computers.

42. **(Original)** A method as recited in claim 41, wherein said step of interrogating the status of plural network connections comprises detecting a carrier on each network connection.

43. **(Original)** A method as recited in claim 41, wherein said step of interrogating the status of plural computers comprises using Packet Internet Groper.

44. **(Original)** A method as recited in claim 41, further comprising the step of maintaining a record of the status of each computer and each network connection in the control unit.

Appl. No. 09/708,492

45. (Original) A method as recited in claim 41, further comprising the step of transferring status data between the computers at the direction of the control unit.

46. (Previously presented) A multiple port unit as recited in claim 1, wherein the interrogation is effected by the control unit sending a packet.

47. (New) A multiple port unit as recited in claim 1, wherein the interrogation of the network links relates to whether a particular network link is working properly.

48. (New) A multiple port unit as recited in claim 1, wherein the control unit being further configured to determine whether it is time to interrogate the network links includes a determination if a preset time for switching network links has elapsed.